

CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA : INDIAN EXPERIENCE

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Children's encyclopaedias have been regarded as the store-houses of knowledge, meeting the needs of children. These are reliable and valid reference materials containing answers to their questions and queries. An encyclopaedia deals with various branches of knowledge broken up into convenient topics and arranged alphabetically. Brahma (1984) has rightly observed, "Illustrations play an important role in children's encyclopaedia. For the clarification of terms, ideas and concepts, they are given in the appropriate places. Carefully planned illustrations stick in the mind of the child and speak volumes to him when words fail". (p. 179).

In India, we have very limited experience in the development of children's encyclopaedia in various regional languages. Nirankar Dev Sewak (1981) remarked, "It is unfortunate that no children's encyclopaedia has so far been published in Hindi. It is a big job, no doubt, but it can be undertaken either by a big publishing house or a body like the National Council for Educational Research and Training, Sahitya Akademy or Hindi Sansthan of Uttar Pradesh. Rajpal and sons had published a *Viswakosh* in ten volumes, but it was not as good as the children's encyclopaedias prepared in Bengali, Tamil or Oriya. *Gyan Sarovar* in five volumes, published by the Publications Division, Government of India, is of course a book of knowledge worth the name." (1981, p. 13).

This picture given by Sewak relating to Hindi might have been improved in the meantime. But the bright pictures as given by him in other language do not seem to

be so, particularly in the field of children's encyclopaedia. The earliest, of course, the *Viswakosh* in Bengali published during 1902-1911 in 22 volumes. This was rendered in Hindi during 1913-31. Now most of the important languages in India have general encyclopaedias. In some languages, the work is still in the process of completion. Despite the concerted attempts after Independence to compile reference books of authentic information, no Indian language can claim to have more than 10% of the total world knowledge within its reach, whereas English can lay claim to about 90% of world knowledge. Thus, it is difficult to conceive of a person who knows only an Indian language to be educated in the modern sense of the term. This is not a happy state of affairs and hence there is need to prepare various types of encyclopaedias and books of knowledge in the Indian languages."

Although Dr. K. M. George is optimistic due to the fact that "Malayalam is heading towards this goal", position of children's encyclopaedia is not clear from his paper. Kutty Krishnan (1982 p. 171) has, however, supplemented this by mentioning, "yes I have to mention that there is only one book to speak of, that is the *Balavijnan Kosham* published by Prabath Books. Even this may appear to be inadequate considering the vastness of subjects open to children in the present circumstances. Though the subjects are not arranged in alphabetical order, an index of the sub-headings is given." Valliappa (1982, p. 5) has given a bright picture of children's encyclopaedia in Tamil. The writer has

noted, "With M. P. Periasamy Thooram as its Chief Editor, the Tamil Academy, has published a general encyclopaedia, *Kozhanthaigal Kalai Kazhanchiyam* (Children's Encyclopaedia); a well produced, illustrated and printed publication that can compare with foreign publication of the same type." Very few Indian languages can really boast of similar achievements.

In Oriya language, a pioneering as well as daring effort was made by Balakrushna Kar as early as in 1939 when he planned to publish a book of knowledge called *Jnanakosh* with the title *Sishu Sankhal* (Wealth of Children) in 8 volumes. Although due to the world War II his intellectual adventure was deterred to a great extent, he was successful in bringing out three volumes entitled *Bichitra Itihas* (Wonderful History) and *Bichitra Viswa* (Wonderful Universe) during the period from 1941-1957.

Mayadhar Mansinha made an attempt to compile and publish a series of encyclopaedia with the help of experts, in an alphabetical order. In 1955 a book *Oriya Jnanakos* (Oriya Encyclopaedia) was brought out by him as a first step in this direction. Subsequently, he could publish four volumes with the title *Sankshipta Oriya Jnanakosh* (Concise Oriya Encyclopaedia) during 1963-65 under the auspices of the Utkal University. This is, however, not a children's encyclopaedia in true sense of the term.

Ramakrushna Nand brought out a book of knowledge entitled *Viswa Parichay* in 1962 putting in about 30 years' efforts. It is a single volume reference material with relevant illustrations and items arranged in an alphabetical order. Binod Kanungo has been publishing a series of popular encyclopaedia called *Jnanamandal* (Encyclopaedia of knowledge) since 1960. He has planned to bring out 60 volumes in all, out of which 40 volumes have already

seen the light of day. these volumes are surprisingly, the outcome of his single-handed efforts and meant both for adults and children due to his simple language and interesting style.

Problems and Prospects

The Education Commission, 1964-66 has rightly said, "There is great explosion of knowledge during the last few decades. In a traditional society, the stock of knowledge is limited and grows slowly so that the main aim of education is interpreted to be its preservation. In a modern society, on the other hand, the stock of knowledge is far greater and the pace of its growth is infinitely quicker." (1966, p. 18) With a view to enabling children to cope up with the emerging "explosion of knowledge", suitable informative material, particularly children's encyclopaedias are very useful aids.

The research studies in the field of psychology and education have revealed that children are very good in reading which gives them not only knowledge but also emotional satisfaction for development of their balanced personality. The eminent psychologists like Piaget, Gagne etc. have pointed out that every child undergoes various stages of mental development accompanied with peculiar interests, attitudes and aptitudes. Children's literature, especially encyclopaedia, have to be developed according to their psychological needs and conditions.

Content, style, vocabulary and treatment in the children's encyclopaedia have to be made selective and appropriate to the children's psychological and sociological conditions. The authors of such reference materials have to be made familiar with these requirements. It has been aptly observed by Dr. George (1982), "The general tendency is to be flamboyant, wordy and indirect. Indiscriminate use of adjectives and high sounding words is

quite a common fault. What is necessary is to convey information precisely using apt words, avoiding all excesses. It is also necessary to keep under check personal preferences and opinions and reflect the consensus while dealing with subjects of a controversial nature, even when the articles are signed. A balanced mind, a scientific and objective approach in addition to a refined taste in the selection of words and phrases are necessary qualifications for those who write and edit articles for an encyclopaedia" (p. 182). Children's encyclopaedia have to be developed more cautiously, precisely and objectively. The writers should be adequately qualified and properly oriented to these requirements. Hence, there must be judicious selection of topics, judicious selection of writers and necessary training, orientation and commitment for them.

Children's encyclopaedias must have adequate number and quality of illustrations which are not ornaments, but necessities. One picture, it is said, is equal to thousands of words. The carefully designed illustrations not only make an encyclopaedia attractive, but also meaningful to children. But competent artists with necessary knowledge and skills for drawing children's illustrations should be identified and given the responsibility as well as freedom.

Since writing of encyclopaedia is a joint responsibility and multidisciplinary in nature, editors have to play a very crucial role in bringing about not only necessary corrections, but also uniformity, balance and objectivity in all volumes. They are required to co-ordinate the activities of all authors and provide necessary academic as well as technical assistance in the matter.

Publishers of children's encyclopaedias are required to spend liberally and judiciously as it is a grand and expensive venture. Printers are to be carefully selected

and suitable printing technology is to be adopted for realising the objectives and giving real concrete shape to abstract ideas. Modern electronic capabilities and know-how have to be adequately utilised for bringing out attractive and perfect children's encyclopaedias.

Conclusion

Children's encyclopaedia is a massive, multi disciplinary and long-term project. It involves a lot of money, mental effort and commitment. A large galaxy of competent writers from all faculties and fields, a big team of devoted editors and workers and large group of ebullient artists have to join their hands and put their heads together in order to develop suitable materials for children's encyclopaedia. Thus close collaboration and co-operation among the authors, editors, illustrators on the one hand, missionary zeal of publishers, and increasingly modern technical know-how of the printers on the other, are necessary to make this venture a success.

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Continued on page 46

Continued from page 20

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